


MILTON'S SONNETS

CONTAINING


the Text, an Introduction consisting of all possible
Critical Questions with Answers, and full Notes
with full Explanations of all difficult passages.



BY

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A Word to Students.

Annotators do not generally think it necessary to give a full context to the explanation of a passage, because they consider that it can be easily supplied by any student of average intelligence. I have, however, even at the risk of seeming childish, ventured to give a full context in a separate paragraph in each case, thus persistently repeating even the usual first line of the context, namely, "This occurs in" &c. The word-notes, which should follow an explanation to make it complete, are given below it; and to distinguish them from other notes, they are not marked by any line-numbers. My object in making this slight and perhaps unnecessary departure has been to make *each explanation quite complete in itself*, and also to impress on the minds of juvenile matriculates the necessity of paying attention to these formal matters.

The questions in the Introduction and the passages *fully explained* in the Notes have been very carefully selected; and students, who want to succeed by cramming, are advised to pay particular attention to them and, if possible, to get them by heart. For this purpose, I have rigorously aimed at *conciseness and simplicity of style*, in order to make the burden on the students' memory as light as possible.

In conclusion, I must acknowledge my indebtedness to Masson, Pattison, Warton, Stopford A. Brooke, Keightley, Verity, Bell, Egerton Smith, and a host of other critics and commentators of Milton.

UTTARPARA COLLEGE,)
The 7th of July 1915.)

The Author.

INTRODUCTION.

1. Give a very brief account of Milton's life.

John Milton, (1608-1674), was the son of a prosperous and cultured London scrivener, who gave his son a good education at school, under a private tutor, and finally at Christ's College, Cambridge, where Milton took his M. A. degree in 1632. Before leaving college, he gave evidence of his poetic genius by composing (1) *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity*, (2) *At a solemn music* and two sonnets (Nos. I and II.)

From 1632-1638, he lived a retired life of study and contemplation of nature at his father's house at Horton in Buckinghamshire, and composed *L'Allegro*, *Il Penseroso*, *Comus*, *Arcades* and *Lycidas*. He then set out on a tour on the continent principally in Italy, whence however he returned to England the next year, on the eve of the great civil and religious struggle in England.

From 1640 to 1660, Milton gave himself up to the service of his country, staunchly supporting the Parliamentary party by his prose-pamphlets and also by his services as

1st period
(a). 1608-1632.
Early life and University life.

1st period
(b). 1632-1639.
Life at Horton and tour in Italy.

2nd period.
1640-1660.
Political life.

Latin Secretary to the Committee of Foreign Affairs. Most of his English sonnets were written during this period. In 1643 he made an unhappy marriage with a lady of a Royalist family who died in 1654. He then married a second and a third wife in 1656 and 1664 respectively.

3rd period.
1660-1674.
The period
of the
great epics.

In 1652 he lost his sight owing to severe strain upon his eyes caused by too heavy clerical and pamphleteering work. At the Restoration in 1660 he lost his post, and though blind, poor and neglected, he lived a quiet and dignified life till 1674. During this period he composed the celebrated epics *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* and the drama *Samson Agonistes*.

2. (a) Discuss the nature of Milton's Puritanism, illustrating your answer by references to the text.

or

What light do the sonnets throw upon Milton's religious and political character? Illustrate your answer by references to the text.

As Macaulay puts it, Milton was neither an extreme Puritan nor a Royalist. To describe his religious and political convictions accurately, one ought to say that "in his character, the noblest qualities of either party were combined in harmonious union."

Like the Puritans, Milton lived "as ever in his great Task-master's eye." In the sonnet *On Mrs. Catherine Thomson*, he shows, how, like the Puritans, he kept his mind continually fixed on an Almighty Judge, who would reward us in heaven with a drink from "pure immortal streams." In the sonnet *On his Blindness*, he manifests a Puritan's tranquil fortitude and pious resignation; in his sonnets *On the late Massacre in Piedmont* and *On the New Forcers of Conscience*, he expresses a Puritan's appreciation of simplicity and purity in worship and condemnation of Catholic as well as Presbyterian forms of Church government.

Milton as
a Puritan.

Like the Royalists, on the other hand, Milton had a strong sense of the value of literature, which is amply manifested in his deep fondness for the Classics. He shows a Cavalier-like relish for elegant amusements in the sonnet *To Cyriac Skinner*, where he says,—

Milton as
a Cavalier.

"To-day deep thoughts resolve with me to
drench
In mirth that after no repenting draws,"
and in the sonnet *To Mr. Lawrence*, where he asks,—

"What neat repast shall feast us, light and
choice,
Of Attic taste, with wine, whence we may rise

To hear the lute well-touched or artful voice
Warble immortal notes and Tuscan air?"

His love of music, a distinctly anti-puritanic trait, appears also in his sonnet *To Mr. H. Lawes on his Airs*. He displays a chivalrous appreciation of love (as well as a fondness for poetry) in the sonnet *To the Nightingale*, where he says,—

"Whether the Muse or Love call thee his mate,
Both them I serve, and of their train am I."

2. (b) What minor features of Milton's character are displayed in his sonnets? Illustrate your answer by references to the text.

or

What light do the sonnets throw upon the following traits of Milton's character, namely, (i) his love of liberty; (ii) his faith in his own greatness, (iii) his tenderness, (iv) his conception of womanhood?

(i) Love of liberty.

As a result of Puritanic tendencies in religion and democratic sympathies in political matters, Milton appears in his sonnets, as a lover of liberty, social, political and religious.

Thus, in replying to the detractors of his *Tetrachordon*, where he has pleaded in favour of a relaxation of the divorce-law, he explains that his object in writing that book was but to

"prompt the age to quit their clogs
By the known rules of ancient liberty."

His sonnets *To the Lord General Cromwell*, *To the Lord General Fairfax*, and *To Sir Henry Vane the Younger*, show that, politically, he was a staunch Commonwealth's man.

His desire to free the church from secular control appears in the sonnet *To the Lord General Cromwell*, in which he denounces the ministers who supported a State-fed clergy, calling them "new foes, threatening to bind our souls with secular chains." In his sonnet *On the New Forcers of Conscience* he denounces Presbyterianism as only another form of ecclesiastical tyranny, saying—"New Presbyterian is but old Priest writ large." His love of simplicity in worship and freedom from ceremonials appears in his eulogy on the Piedmontese, who, he says, "kept thy truth so pure of old."

Throughout his life, Milton had a strong faith in his own poetic mission in life. This forms the theme of his sonnet *On his having arrived at the age of Twenty-three*. He alludes to this again in his sonnet *On his Blindness* where he speaks of his poetic gift as "that one talent lodged with me useless."

As an instance of his tenderness one may mention that, in the sonnet *On his deceased wife*, he speaks of her as his "late espoused

(ii) Faith
in his own
greatness.

(iii) Tenderness and
depth of
affection.

saint" who appeared to him in a dream, "vested all in white, pure as her mind."

(iv) Con-
ception of
woman-
hood.

Though, in his *De Doctrina Christiana*, we find Milton regarding women as creatures of an inferior and subordinate class, created to minister to the appetite and comforts of the nobler being, man, yet all the women celebrated in his sonnets are of a deeply religious and spiritual type. The "Virtuous young Lady", Mrs. Catherine Thomson, as well as his deceased wife, Catherine Woodcock are spoken of as enjoying or being fit to enjoy the 'pure immortal streams' of heaven; and Lady Margaret Ley is said to be a highly accomplished lady, possessing all the "noble virtues" of her father. As Mr. Stopford Brooke says, Milton has sketched four beautiful types of womanhood,—the virgin wise and pure, the Christian woman, the noble matron, and the perfect wife.

3. What light is thrown upon the different sides of Milton's character and views by his sonnets? Illustrate your answer by references to the text.

[Combine the answers to Q. 2 (a) and Q. 2 (b) above.]

4. What evidence of Milton's scholarship do you find in his sonnets? Give illustrations.

The sonnets contain but too many evidences of Milton's profound learning and

scholarship. Purity of form and strict adherence to Italian models mark these sonnets as the productions of a scholar; and the variety of classical and Biblical allusions and reminiscences bears the same testimony.

(A) Classical allusions &c.

In these sonnets, Alcestis and Alexander Isocrates and Pyrrhus mingle company with Dante and Casella. Personages and incidents from mythology—'the Hydra', 'the Muses' bower,' 'Latona's twin-born progeny', the dance of 'the jolly hours'—lend grace and depth to his writings.

All this goes hand in hand with a style, enriched by (I) a classical vocabulary and (II) Classical ideas.

As for the former, we may note the use of—(1) 'dishonest'—in the Latin sense of 'dishonourable' (Sonnet No. X.), (2) 'just'—in the Latin sense of 'correct' (Sonnet No. XIII.), (3) 'virtue'—in the Latin sense of 'courage' (Sonnet No. XV.), (4) 'nerves'—in the Latin sense of 'muscles' (Sonnet No. XVII).

As for the latter, we may mention—(1) that the "serpent wings" of the Hydra are borrowed from Euripides; (2) that the line "their martyred blood and ashes sow over all the Italian fields" is an allusion to a saying of Tertullian; (3) that Milton's conception of angels as "posting o'er land and ocean" is based on Greek *Angelos*, meaning a mess-

enger ; and lastly, (4) that the epithet bestowed on Lawrence, "Of virtuous father virtuous son," and the advice given to Cyriac Skinner, "To measure life, learn thou betimes," are echoes of passages in Horace's Odes.

(B) Biblical
allusions
&c.

(a) Biblical ideas and (b) Biblical expressions also occur very frequently in the sonnets.

As for the former, we may mention that in the sonnet, *To a Virtuous young Lady* the story of Mary and the parable of the wise virgins from the New Testament are found side by side with the story of Ruth taken from the Old. Further, in other sonnets Milton refers to,—St Paul's vision of "the Babylonian woe", the parable of the hidden talent, and to the old Mosaic law of Purification "from spot of child-bed taint."

As for phraseology adapted from the Bible, we may note,—(1) "the broad way and the green", (2) "casting pearl to hogs" and (3) "the lily and the rose that neither sowed nor spun"—adapted from St. Matthew ; (4) "the better part chosen thou hast"—from St. Luke ; and lastly (5) "pure immortal streams"—an adaptation of the common Biblical phrase, 'waters of Life.'

5. How would you classify Milton's sonnets according to their subjects ?

At the outset, we may broadly divide Milton's sonnets into two classes :—

A. Containing references to himself or his friends ; i.e. sonnets of a personal nature.

B. Containing allusions to leading events or men of the age ; i.e. sonnets of a rather impersonal nature.

A. The personal sonnets may be classified into—

(1) Sonnets possessing an autobiographical interest, namely—Nos. I, II, VIII, XIX, XXII. Of these, the last is addressed to a personal friend, Cyriac Skinner, but its subject is Milton's blindness.

(2) Sonnets on his personal friends, namely—Nos. IX, X, XIII, XIV, XX, XXI, XXIII. Of these four are on ladies, namely Nos. IX, X, XIV, XXIII ; the last, No. XXIII, being on his deceased second wife, Catherine Woodcock.

B. The other sonnets may be subdivided into—

(1) Sonnets on important public events of the age, namely—Nos. XV, XVI, XVII, XVIII. Of these, the first three are addressed to leading men of the age, but the subject in each case is some political or religious event.

(2) Sonnets of a controversial character, namely—Nos. XI, XII, XIIa. Of these, the first two possess a sort of autobiographical interest, being Milton's reply to the adverse criticism of one of his pamphlets on Divorce.

Mr. Stopford A. Brooke has classified the sonnets roughly into four classes, namely (1) the three controversial sonnets (Nos. XI, XII, XIIa), (2) the four political sonnets (Nos. XV, XVI, XVII, XVIII), (3) the four sonnets addressed to women (Nos. IX, X, XIV, XXIII), (4) the remaining eight being personal sonnets.

6. What do you know about Milton's blindness? What does the poet himself tell us about it in his sonnets, and how does he console himself?

Milton has written two sonnets on his blindness, of which the latter is addressed to his friend and pupil, Cyriac Skinner. We learn from his own pen that he lost his eyes, because he persisted in writing an elaborate pamphlet, "Defence of the English people" in reply to Salmasius's "Defence of the King." His eyes had been already weak through incessant work as Latin Secretary and party-pamphleteer, and his physician had warned him against hard work. But, as he says, "the choice lay before me between dereliction of a supreme duty and loss of eye-sight ; in such a case, I could not listen to the physician." As a consequence, he became totally blind in 1652.

In the first sonnet on his blindness, Milton expresses the anxiety, which he feels on finding himself bereft of that natural gift,

which alone could enable him to realise his high poetic mission in life. He apprehends that he would have to spend the latter portion of his life in a "dark world and wide" while his talent will remain lodged with him useless. He consoles himself, however, with the reflection that God does not depend upon man's work ; and that those "who best bear His mild yoke" also serve him.

In the second sonnet, he informs Cyriac Skinner that his eyes were "clear to outward view" and also tells his friend that it is "conscience" which supports him in this dire bereavement,—the knowledge, that he lost his eyes 'in Liberty's defence."

7. What do you know of the ladies addressed in some of Milton's sonnets? What does the poet say about them?

(1) *To a Virtuous young Lady.*

There are four sonnets by Milton addressed to ladies.

The sonnet *To a Virtuous young Lady* probably refers to a Miss Davis, with whom Milton was very friendly. Milton praises her as one labouring up "the hill of heavenly Truth" and zealous to fill her "odorous lamp with deeds of light," as a result of which, she is sure to be rewarded in heaven.

(2) *To the Lady Margaret Ley.*

The sonnet *To the Lady Margaret Ley*,—daughter of Sir James Ley, Earl of Marlborough, Lord High Treasurer of England

(1624) and Lord President of the Council (1627)—describes her as a worthy daughter of her late father endowed with all his noble qualities ; so that, the poet says, "By you, Madam, methinks I see him living yet."

(3) *On the Religious Memory of Mrs. Catharine Thomson*

The next sonnet is *On the Religious Memory of Mrs. Catharine Thomson*, who was perhaps a lady of a certain Thomson family with whom Milton resided in 1649. She is described as a very pious lady, possessing the high Christian virtues of Faith and Love, and being devoted throughout her life to "works and alms" and "good endeavour". The poet is sure that she is now drinking her fill of "pure immortal streams" in heaven.

(4) *On his Deceased Wife.*

The last of the sonnets on ladies is addressed to Milton's second wife, Catherine Woodcock, who died in childbed of a daughter fifteen months after their marriage in 1656. Milton had a dream of her in which he saw her appear "vested all in white, pure as her mind." Her face, though veiled, seemed to shine with "love, sweetness, goodness." But just as she was about to embrace him, the poet unfortunately awoke, and his dream vanished.

Mr. Stopford A. Brooke says that in the sonnets, Milton sketches "four beautiful types of womanhood—the 'virgin wise and pure'; the noble matron, 'honoured Margaret' the

Christian woman, his friend ; the perfect wife, whom he looked to see in heaven."

8. What do you know of the personal friends of Milton, addressed in his sonnets ?

Six personal friends of Milton are addressed in his sonnets of whom three are ladies. These are—

(1) "A Virtuous young Lady," who is probably a Miss Davis ;

(2) Lady Margaret Ley, daughter of Sir James Ley, Earl of Marlborough, Lord High Treasurer and Lord President of the Council ;

(3) Mrs. Catherine Thomson, who perhaps belonged to the family of a Mr. Thomson, in whose house near Charing Cross, Milton lived about the year 1649 ;*

(4) Henry Lawes, a Royalist friend of Milton, and a celebrated composer, who set Milton's masques, *Comus* and *Arcades* to music ;

(5) Mr. Lawrence, son of Henry Lawrence, a kinsman of Cromwell, and Lord President of the Council of State :

(6) Cyriac Skinner, a lawyer, an admiring pupil and afterwards an intimate friend and favourite of Milton. He was the grandson of Chief Justice Sir Edward Coke.

9. What do you know of the public men whom Milton addresses in his sonnets ? What characteristics of these men are noticed by the poet ?

The three great public men whom Milton addresses in his sonnets are,—(1) Lord General Fairfax, (2) Lord General Oliver Cromwell, and (3) Sir Henry Vane, the Younger.

(1) Fairfax. As regards Fairfax, his bravery as a general is the only feature that Milton dwells upon, concluding his sonnet with an appeal to him to take up the nobler task of clearing "public faith" from "public fraud." Mr. Pattison says,—
 "Of his generalship, in which he was second to Cromwell only and of his love of arts and learning, nothing is said, though the last was the passion of his life for which at forty, he renounced ambition." Fairfax was further a man of sterling character in public life.

(2) Cromwell. In his sonnet on Cromwell, Milton praises his firmness in the midst of clamours of malice, his perseverance in the path of faith and virtue and his greatness as a general. The poet implores him to take up the work of reforming the Church of England, suggesting that it would be wrong to establish a state-fed or "hireling" clergy in England. The character of Cromwell, which the poet does not very elaborately go into, has furnished much room for historical and literary controversy; some, like Gray, taking him as a tyrant guilty of his country's blood; others, like Carlyle,

regarding him as a hero and the saviour of his country in a time of crisis. As a matter of fact, he might have been domineering or autocratic in temper, but was nevertheless a true and sincere patriot.

Sir Henry Vane the Younger is described by the poet as a sage politician though young in years. Milton reminds him that his politics must not be confined to foreign affairs only, but that he must reform the Church and systematise the internal administration of England. Vane was an Independent leader and an energetic opponent of the King. "He was an eccentric character in an age of eccentric characters. In religion the most fanatic of all enthusiasts, he was a judicious and sagacious politician." (Warton).

(3) Vane
the Younger.

10. What were the occasions which led to the writing of the following sonnets ?

(1) *When the assault was intended to the city ;* (No. VIII.)

(2) *On the detraction which followed upon my writing certain treatises ;* (Nos. XI & XII.)

(3) *On the New Forcers of Conscience under the Long Parliament ;* (No. XIIa).

(4) *To the Lord General Cromwell,—On the proposals of certain ministers ;* (No. XVI.)

(5) *On the Late Massacre in Piedmont ;* No. XVIII.)

(See Notes on the above sonnets Nos. VIII, XI, XIIa, XVI and XVIII).

11. Give the Miltonic sense as well as the modern meaning of each of the following words :

or

Write philological notes on the following words :

(a) *spray* (Sonnet No. I), (b) *sad*, *bowyer* (Sonnet No. VIII), (c) *dishonest* (Sonnet No. X), (d) *phylacteries*, *haul* (Sonnet No. XIIa), (e) *just*, *committing* (Sonnet No. XIII), *endeavour*, *purple* (Sonnet No. XIV), (f) *virtue*, *imp* (Sonnet No. XV), (g) *talent*, *fondly* (Sonnet No. XIX), (h) *waste*, *artful* (Sonnet No. XX), (i) *Conscience* (Sonnet No. XXII.)

(See Notes.)

12. What are sonnets ? Give a short history of them. Discuss the rime and style of Milton's sonnets.

A sonnet defined.

A sonnet (literally, a diminutive song) is a short complete poem, consisting of fourteen lines in Iambic pentameter, riming according to some conventional scheme. It consists of two parts ; (1) the octave, or the first eight lines, generally ending with a pause in thought and sometimes even a full-stop ; (2) the sestet, or the last six lines containing the conclusion.

A short history of sonnets.

The sonnet was first brought to England from Italy by Wyatt and Surrey ; "Spenser

and Shakespeare adopted each a special type and established it. They both use three quatrains with a pause in the sense after each, and then a couplet at the close." This is the English sonnet, as opposed to the Petrarchan or Italian sonnet, which Milton revived in England. •

The rhyme-scheme of the octave in Milton's sonnets (as well as in the Italian models which Milton followed) never varies. It is *abba abba*. The sestet in Milton, though generally following the Petrarchan model, is however not so rigidly conventional. As regards the pause or division in thought between the octave and the sestet, Milton is very irregular. •

The rhyme of Milton's sonnets

The Sonnet *On the New Forcers of Conscience under the Long Parliament* (No. XIIa) is irregular according to the principles of structure of the English sonnet though Italian poets and critics recognise such a poem of twenty lines as the *Sonetto Coduta*, or the "Tailed Sonnet."

The language of Milton's sonnets is generally simpler than that of his other poems in the sense that they are less burdened with figures of speech. The syntax however is highly involved, a string of subordinate clauses being often used to qualify the nominative in the first line. (See Nos. X, XVI,

The style of Milton's sonnets.

and XIX). There are numerous elliptical constructions, Latinisms and archaisms. Though many allusions are mythological, there are many more taken from the Bible, the thought and even the language of which have also been frequently borrowed by Milton.

18. Amplify or write short essays on the following :—

(a) *Licence they mean when they cry Liberty.* (Sonnet No. XII, l. 11.)

(b) *New Presbyterian is but old Priest writ large.* (Sonnet No. XIIa, l. 20.)

(c) *Peace hath her victories no less renowned than war.* (Sonnet No. XVI, ll. 10-11)

(d) *They also serve who only stand and wait.* (Sonnet No. XIX, l. 14.)

[Develop the points given in the Explanations of the above passages—pages 40,47-48, 60 61 and 69-70 respectively.]

Sonnet No. I.

TO THE NIGHTINGALE.

O Nightingale that on yon bloomy spray
 Warblest at eve, when all the woods are still,
 Thou with fresh hope the lover's heart dost fill,
 While the jolly hours lead on propitious May.
 5 Thy liquid notes that close the eye of day,
 First heard before the shallow cuckoo's bill,
 Portend success in love. O, if Jove's will

before the cuckoo's notes, portends success in love.

The jolly hours lead on &c.—alluding to the Hours or Horae, three daughters of Zeus. The predicate *lead on* suggests the dance of the Horae, which symbolised the progress of the seasons.

Propitious—favourable to love.

May—a double figure; Metonymy and Personification.

5. *Liquid*—sweet and flowing.

Close the eye of day—are so soothing that they lull day to sleep, as it were. Day is personified, the Sun being his eye; the nightingale sings only after sunset.

6. *Shallow*—stupid; unskilled in song; a term of contempt.

Bill—song. Fig. Synecdoche.

7-10. Expl. [Context as before.]

He here entreats the nightingale to sing out full and clear, before the cuckoo's unwelcome notes indicate disappointment in love to the unhappy poet.

Jove—Jupiter, the king of heaven and ruler of gods and men.

Amorous—pertaining to 'amour' or love-affairs. *Amorous power* is therefore the power to bring about success in love.

The rude bird of hate—(1) the cuckoo which is hated by other birds; (2) the cuckoo which is hated by married as well as unmarried people, because its notes are unpropitious to love.

Foretell my hopeless doom—portend, to my despair, failure in love. Fig. Transferred Epithet.

12. *Relief*—from my present unsatisfactory condition of an unbeloved bachelor.

13-14. *Expl.* [Context as before.]

He here fancifully invokes the nightingale's aid on his own behalf, saying that he, being a servant of the Muses as well as of Love, certainly deserves to be favoured by the bird so dear to lovers and so famous in literature.

The Muse—here perhaps the goddess of song. The nine muses of classical mythology presided over the different branches of learning and fine arts.

His—agrees with the nearer antecedent "Love", which is personified as a god.

Both them I serve—I am a poet as well as a votary of Love.

Sonnet No. II.

ON HIS HAVING ARRIVED AT THE AGE OF
TWENTY-THREE.

How soon hath Time, the subtle thief of youth,
Stolen on his wing my three and twentieth
year!

My hasting days fly on with full career,
 But my late spring no bud or blossom
shew'th.

5 Perhaps my semblance might deceive the
truth

That I to manhood am arrived so near ;
 And inward ripeness doth much less appear,
 Than some more timely-happy spirits endu'th.

Yet, be it less or more, or soon or slow,
 10 It shall be still in strictest measure even
 To that same lot, however mean or high,
 Toward which Time leads me, and the will
of Heaven ;

All is, if I have grace to use it so,
 As ever in my great Task-master's eye.

1. *The subtle thief*—because the flight of Time is imperceptible. *I'ving* in the next line, suggests that Time is here imaged as a bird.

[Context.]

3-4. Expl. This occurs in Milton's sonnet *On his having arrived at the age of Twenty-three*. This sonnet, which was inserted in a letter to a friend, expresses Milton's life-long conviction that he was destined to gain "an immortality of fame" by writing a great poem.

The poet here regrets that he has as yet neither taken up any profession nor showed

any signs of great poetic achievement, although the time when he should have taken his first steps in life is already past. It is now not only the spring-time of his life, but a rather "late spring", and, even after this long period of preparation, there is at yet no fruit.

Hasting days fly on—days are metaphorically spoken of as birds.

My late spring...shew'th—a change of metaphor. *Spring* stands for youthful maturity, and *bud and blossom* for the results of one's studies.

5. *Perhaps my semblance &c.*—Milton looked much younger than his years and was called "the lady of Christ's." *Semblance*—outward appearance.

7-8 Expl. [Context as before.]

The poet here regrets that, even after a long course of preparation, he does not find himself fully qualified for the achievement of his high poetic mission in life. Others, who are blest with comparative precocity or a quicker development of their powers, have already given proofs of their merits.

Inward ripeness—that maturity of mind which characterises other more fortunate ones.
Fig. Metaphor.

Timely-happy—happy or fortunate in

respect of the time of their maturity ; i.e. those whose mental powers had an early development.

Endu'th—in modern English, “endows”, a transitive verb having “spirits” for its object ; its subject is “ripeness.”

9. *Or soon or slow*—whether soon or slow (in modern English).

10. *Even*—proportionate.

13-14. **Expl.** [Context as before.]

The poet, after regretting that his mission in life is still unaccomplished, consoles himself with the reflection that he need not worry himself on account of his imperfections ; because his powers, however small, will, he hopes, be adequate for his high purpose, if only he can use them with the consciousness that God himself is looking on and judging of his deeds.

All is—(1) his power is already sufficient for his purpose ; all the power he requires is already in his possession ; or (2) all is saved ; “all depends upon my employing it.”

(Keightley.)

Task-master—alluding to the parable of the labourers in the vineyard, (St. Matthew xx) which represents all human beings as labourers and the world as a vineyard, where

everyone who is idle or neglects his duty is punished by God, the master of the vineyard.

[*Sonnet Nos. III to VII are in Latin.*]

Sonnet No. VIII.

WHEN THE ASSAULT WAS INTENDED
TO THE CITY.

Captain or Colonel or Knight in Arms,
Whose chance on these defenceless doors
may seize,

If deed of honour did thee ever please,
Guard them, and him within protect from
harms.

He can requite thee ; for he knows the charms 5
That call fame on such gentle acts as these,
And he can spread thy name o'er lands and
seas,

Whatever clime the sun's bright circle warms.
Lift not thy spear against the Muses' bower :
The great Emathian conqueror bid spare 10
The house of Pindarus, when temple and
tower

Went to the ground ; and the repeated air
Of sad Electra's poet had the power
To save the Athenian walls from ruin bare.

The Occasion of the Sonnet.

Civil war broke out between King Charles I
and his Parliament in 1640. After the in-
decisive battle of Edgehill in 1642, the Royal-

ist army marched upon Brentford with a view to attack the city of London. Milton, as an ardent Parliamentarian, wrote this sonnet, as if intending that it would be fixed on his door as an appeal to whatever captain might be in command of the Royalist party, that would chance to sack the houses in Aldersgate street, where Milton lived.

2. *Whose chance...seize*—whose chance it may be to seize &c., i. e. who may happen to attack this house ; a peculiar construction.

5. *The charms*—the magic of verses.

8. *Whatever clime...warms*.—i. e. wherever the Sun shines. Fig. Periphrasis.

[Context.]

9-14. **Expl.** This occurs in Milton's sonnet, *When the assault was intended to the city*. When the Royalists, after the battle of Edgehill, marched towards London, Milton wrote this sonnet, as if intending that it would be fixed on his door as an appeal to whatever captain might be in command of the Royalist party that would chance to sack the houses in Aldersgate street, where Milton lived

He says, "Don't show violence to a poet. The dignity and privileges of the profession of poetry have been recognized by the sternest generals of the world. Alexander the Great, when he captured Thebes, ordered his soldiers

to spare the house of Pindar.. When the Spartans under Lysander took Athens in 404 B. C. and were about to destroy the city, they heard a Phocian singing a chorus from the *Electra* of Euripides, and were so greatly affected by it, that they eventually spared the city."

Muses' bower—the Muses were nine goddesses of poetry and other fine art. A poet, being a votary of the Muses may call his abode, a "Muses' bower." Fig. Periphrasis. *Bower* is here used in its primary sense of 'dwelling place;' the modern meaning is 'a leafy shelter.'

The great Emathian conqueror—Alexander the Great of Macedonia. Emathia was a district of Macedonia and the original seat of the Macedonian monarchy.

Pindarus—or Pindar, a famous lyric poet of Greece, well-known for his Odes. As a matter of fact, Alexander's clemency to Pindar was due to the latter's praises of Alexander's grandfather,

Electra's poet—Euripides, an Athenian tragic dramatist. *Electra* was a daughter of Agamemnon, who was murdered by his wife, Clytaemnestra. This story, taken from Homer, forms the plot of Euripides's tragedy, *Electra*.

Sad—(1) qualifying 'Electra', who was

'sad' because of her father's violent death ,
 (2) qualifying 'poet',—meaning 'grave and
 serious', the common Miltonic sense of the
 word.

Sonnet No. IX.

TO A VIRTUOUS YOUNG LADY.

Lady, that in the prime of earliest youth
 Wisely hast shunned the broad way and the
green,
 And with those few art eminently seen
 That labour up the hill of heavenly Truth,
 5 The better part with Mary and with Ruth
 Chosen thou hast ; and they that overween,
 And at thy growing virtues fret their spleen,
 No anger find in thee, but pity and ruth.
 Thy care is fixed, and zealously attends
 10 To fill thy odorous lamp with deeds of light,
 And hope that reaps not shame. Therefore
be sure,
 Thou, when the Bridegroom with his feastful
friends
 Passes to bliss at the mid-hour of night,
 Hast gained thy entrance, Virgin wise and
pure.

[Context.]

1-6. Expl. This occurs in Milton's sonnet
To a Virtuous young Lady.

| Milton describes her as one of those who

have shunned the path of vice and are struggling to attain truth. Like Mary and Ruth, says Milton, she has wisely chosen what is best for her.

Lady—probably a Miss Davis ; the identity is uncertain.

Prime of earliest youth—tautological for the sake of emphasis.

The broad way and the green—Cf. St. Matthew, 'Broad is the way that leadeth to destruction' ; i.e. the path of sin which is a soft and pleasant way.

The hill of heavenly Truth—Spiritual Truth or Knowledge is compared to a hill, because it is difficult to attain.

Mary—alluding to Christ's reception at the house of two sisters, Martha and Mary, where Martha complained to Christ saying that her sister was not helping her in getting the provisions ready. Mary was listening to Christ, and so Christ said,—“She hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.”

Ruth—Naëmi, an Israelite lady, had a daughter-in-law named Ruth, who belonged to the land of Moab, where Jehova was not worshipped. She followed her mother-in-law to Israel, saying—“Thy people shall be my people and thy God, my God.”

6. *Overween*—think too highly of themselves; i.e. are conceited or arrogant; an obsolete use.

7. *Spleen*—anger. The spleen was believed by old anatomists to be the seat of anger and peevishness.

8. *Pity and ruth* - tautological (for the of emphasis); *ruth*, meaning pity.

9-11. Expl. [Context as before].

Milton speaks of her as one, whose whole mind was bent upon the performance of such virtuous deeds as would illuminate her very soul and ensure for her the hope of heaven.

Attends to fill—is attentive to the filling of; a peculiar use of the verb.

To fill thy odorous lamp &c.—The allusion is to the parable of the Ten Virgins in St. Matthew xxv. The lady is here likened to the five wise virgins, who, unlike their foolish sisters took a plentiful supply of oil in their lamps; so that, when they went out to meet the Bridegroom, their lamps were burning all right. Thus they were able to gain admittance into the marriage-feast. The Bridegroom stands for Christ; the marriage-feast represents the feast of eternal spiritual bliss to be enjoyed by all virtuous souls after the Day of Judgment. (*The mid-hour of night* in l. 13 therefore means that awful day when the universe will be dissolved.)

Thy odorous lamp - i. e. the soul of the virtuous lady who already possessed many sweet qualities ; hence, 'odorous.'

Deeds of light - i. e. virtuous deeds ; which are compared to light because such deeds lead other men by their noble example. Cf. St. Matthew, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works"

Hope, that reaps not shame--(1) subject to the verb "is fixed" understood ; thy hope is all fixed in heaven and is sure not to reap the shame of disappointment ; (2) object of the prep. 'with' in l. 10 ; your resolution is fixed to illuminate your soul with the light of pious acts and fill your whole mind with thoughts and hopes of heaven, which will surely not suffer disappointment. Cf. St. Matthew, "Hope maketh not ashamed."

Reaps—Present for future ; the tense indicates certainty or strength of the poet's conviction.

11-14. Expl. [Context as before].

Milton says that, as the lady is constantly engaged in virtuous deeds, she is in no danger of being shut out of the kingdom of heaven, when Christ with his beloved followers will take his seat on a heavenly throne after the last day of Judgment.

The bridegroom with his feastful friends—The allusion is to the parable of the Ten

Virgins in St. Matthew xxv. [See Note in the previous explanation].

Sonnet No. X.

TO THE LADY MARGARET LEY.

Daughter to that good Earl, once President
Of England's Council and her Treasury,
Who lived in both unstained with gold or fee,
And left them both, more in himself content,
5 Till the sad breaking of that Parliament
Broke him, as that dishonest victory
At Chæronea, fatal to liberty,
Killed with report that old man eloquent ;
Though later born than to have known the
days
10 Wherein your father flourished, yet by you,
Madam, methinks I see him living yet :
So well your words his noble virtues praise
That all both judge you to relate them true
And to possess them, honoured Margaret.

1. *That good earl &c.*—the famous Earl of Marlborough, Lord High Treasurer and Lord President of the Council. His name was Sir James Ley.

3-8. Expl. This occurs in Milton's sonnet *To the Lady Margaret Ley*. The poet calls the lady a worthy daughter of her great father, Sir

James Ley who served England as Lord High Treasurer (1624) and afterwards as Lord President of the Council, (1628).

Milton says that Sir James's character was untainted by acceptance of bribes in either office and that he cared more for inner peace of mind than for the pomp of public life. When Charles I dissolved his third parliament (1629), Sir James Ley (as was thought) died from the effects of disappointment at the dissolution, which was a severe blow to English liberty, just as the loss of Greek liberty at Chaeronia killed Isocrates.

Fee—O. E. *feoh*—cattle; hence property, money; here, bribes. The modern meaning is 'wages'.

Gold or fee,—meaning the same thing, is a repetition for the sake of emphasis.

That parliament—Charles I's third parliament, dissolved in March 1629.

Breaking—dissolution. *Broke him*—broke down his spirit and strength and hence killed him. Note the pun on "break."

Dishonest—Lat. *honestus*—honourable; hence, dishonourable or disgraceful (to the victors). The modern sense of the word is unfair, illegal or false.

Dishonest victory—fig. Oxymoron. Milton calls it dishonourable because it was fatal to Greek liberty.

Chaeronia—At this battle, Philip^{II} of Macedon conquered the allied Athenians and Thebans. (B. C. 338).

That old man eloquent—Isocrates, a famous Athenian teacher of Rhetoric, supposed to have committed suicide, on hearing of the result of the battle of Chaeronia.

9. *Though later born &c.*—i. e. though born *too late* to have known &c. This absolute use of the comparative degree is a Latinism, common in Milton. Cf. *Il Penseroso*, 'weaker view.' The line should not be taken too literally. When the Earl died, (1629), Milton was only 21 years old.

12-13. *All both...them*—We all believe that you not only describe your father's virtues correctly, but also possess them yourself.

Sonnet No. XI.

ON THE DETRACTION WHICH FOLLOWED
UPON MY WRITING CERTAIN
TREATISES.

A book was writ of late called *Tetrachordon*,
And woven close, both matter, form, and style ;
The subject new : it walked the town a while

Numbering good intellects ; now seldom pored
on.

Cries the stall-reader, "Bless us ! what a word
on 5

A title-page is this !", and some in file
Stand speilling false, while one might walk
• to Mile-
End Green. Why, is it harder, sirs, than
Gordon,

Colkitto, or Macdonnel, or Galasp ?

Those rugged names to our like mouths grow
sleek 10

That would have made Quintilian stare and
gasp.

Thy age, like ours, O soul of Sir John Cheek,
Hated not learning worse than toad or asp,
When thou taught'st Cambridge and King
Edward Greek.

The Occasion of the Sonnet. In 1643, Milton wrote a pamphlet called *The Doctrine and Discipline of Marriage Restored*,—the immediate outcome of his unhappy marriage with Mary Powell, a frivolous and uneducated girl of a Cavalier family of Oxfordshire. Amongst other unusual views, Milton pleaded that incompatibility of temper is a good ground for divorce. The Presbyterians as well as the Episcopalians violently attacked the

too liberal-minded pamphleteer, and Milton in reply wrote three other pamphlets, one of which was *Tetrachordon* (a Greek word, meaning "four-stringed"). The book was so named as it contained "Expositions upon the *four* chief places in Scripture, which treat of marriage or nullities in marriage".

This sonnet and the next were written by Milton in anger at the violent abuse flung upon his divorce-pamphlets.

2. *Both matter, form, and style*—i. e. in respect of argument, plan, and language. As a matter of fact, Milton's prose-works are characterised by close reasoning and an involved syntax.

3. *Walked the town a while*—had a good circulation in the city of London, for a time.

4. *Numbering good intellects*—testing the readers' powers of understanding.

[Context.]

5-8. Expl. This occurs in Milton's sonnet *On the detraction which followed upon my writing certain treatises*. This sonnet was written in anger at the violent criticism of one of his divorce-pamphlets, (called the *Tetrachordon*), by Presbyterians as well as Episcopalians.

The poet here makes a rather poor attempt at humour about the harshness of the name *Tetrachordon*, saying that the word was too

big and hard for his illiterate critics to read and pronounce.

Stall-reader—persons standing at book-stalls and reading the names of books. Milton uses it as a term of contempt ; he wants to imply that such readers, out of curiosity only, look at the title-pages of different books without troubling themselves about their contents.

In file—standing one behind another.

While one.....Green. These foolish readers take so much time in spelling out the title, that one might walk up to Mile-End Green by that time. Milton is here hyperbolical for the sake of humour.

The *Mile-End Green* was a meadow about a mile distant from the centre of London. It was, in Milton's time, "the favourite terminus of a citizen's walk." (Masson).

9. *Colkitto* literally means 'left-handed.' *Macdonnel* and *Galasp*, in modern language, would be 'Macdonald' and 'Gillespie.' These three names, as Dr. Masson points out, refer to the same person, Alexander Macdonald, son of Gillespie, usually called "young Col-kitto," an officer in Montrose's army.

10-14. **Expl.** [Context as before].

Referring to the harshness of the name, Tetrachordon, he says that amongst Scotch-

men harsher names are in existence, and adds regretfully that modern Englishmen are less acquainted with Greek than they were in the age of Sir John Cheek, the first regular Professor of Greek at Cambridge.

Quintilian—the greatest Roman writer on Rhetoric.

Sir John Cheek—Milton was interested in him as a learned man and also as a member of a commission which proposed to relax the divorce-law.

Taught King Edward Greek—Cheek also acted as private tutor to Edward VI.

Sonnet No. XII.

ON THE SAME.

I did but prompt the age to quit their clogs
 By the known rules of ancient liberty,
 When straight a barbarous noise environs me
 Of owls and cuckoos, asses, apes and dogs ;
 5 As when those hinds that were transformed to
 frogs

Railed at Latona's twin-born progeny,
 Which after held the Sun and Moon in fee.
 But this is got by casting pearl to hogs,
 That bawl for freedom in their senseless mood,
 10 And still revolt when Truth would set them
 free,

Licence they mean when they cry Liberty ;
 For who loves that must first be wise and good :
 But from that mark how far they rove we see,
 For all this waste of weath and loss of blood.

The Occasion of the Sonnet. [Same as that of the previous sonnet, No. XI., See p. 35 *ante*.]

2. *Ancient liberty*—the liberty given to man (by the Bible) with respect to divorce. This liberty was afterwards "restrained by ecclesiastical, and other laws." Milton, in contempt, compares these to *clogs*,—"such as are put upon animals to prevent them from straying." •

5-7 Expl. This occurs in Milton's second sonnet written in reply to the detractors of his *Tetrachordon*, a treatise on divorce, which was severely criticised by Presbyterians and Episcopalians alike. [Context

In reply, he calls his critics 'owls' 'apes' and 'dogs', and says that they could not appreciate his work, just as the Lycian rustics could not appreciate the greatness of Latona's twin children and were turned into frogs in consequence.

Latona—(otherwise known as *Leto*), mother of Zeus and of the twins, Apollo and

Artemis. She left heaven, being persecuted by Here, the wife of Zeus. During her wanderings, she once wished to drink of a small lake in Lycia, but the rustics there railed at her and her twins, for which they were turned into frogs.

Held the Sun and Moon in fee—Apollo was afterwards the god of the Sun, and Artemis, the goddess of the Moon. "To hold in fee", i. e. *in fee-simple*, is a legal phrase indicating very nearly absolute ownership. Milton, by likening the fate of his book to that of the divine twins, is probably suggesting that he himself was destined to future greatness, while posterity would not even care to remember the crifics.

8-11. Expl. [Context as before.]

He bitterly remarks that it is no use to offer enlightened ideas to stupid and obstinate people. They foolishly shout for Liberty, but what they want is not true liberty, which means freedom from a lower law in order to give obedience to a higher. They really desire to escape from the bonds of law altogether and turn society into a sphere of unmitigated wilfulness.

Casting pearl to hogs—Cf. St. Matthew, "Neither cast your pearl before swine."

Still—always.

Truth would set them free—Cf. St. John,
 “The truth shall make you free.”

Licence they mean—A note to Tetrachordon shows that Milton believed that the difficulty of obtaining divorce was responsible for much illegitimate intercourse.

13-14. *But from...blood*.—In spite of this tremendous loss of life and money in the Civil War, which they are waging for the sake of greater political liberty, they are still far behind the ideal of true Liberty.

Sonnet No XIIa.

ON THE NEW FORCERS OF CONSCIENCE
 UNDER THE LONG PARLIAMENT.

Because you have thrown off your Prelate

Lord,

And with stiff vows renounced his Liturgy,
 To seize the widowed whore Plurality
 From them whose sin ye envied, not abhorred,
 Dare ye for this adjure the civil sword
 To force our consciences that Christ set free,
 And ride us with a Classic Hierarchy,
 Taught ye by mere A. S. and Rutherford?
 Men whose life, learning, faith, and pure
 intent,

Would have been held in high esteem with
 Paul,

Must now be named and printed heretics
 By shallow Edwards and Scotch What-d'ye-
call !

But we do hope to find out all your tricks,
 Your plots and packing, worse than those of
Trent,

15 That so the Parliament
 May with their wholesome and preventive
shears
 Clip your phylacteries, though baulk your ears,
 And succour our just fears,
 When they shall read this clearly in your charge
 20 New *Presbyter* is but old *Priest* writ large.

The Occasion of the Sonnet In 1642, the Long Parliament abolished the Episcopal system of Church government, and in 1643, the Westminster Assembly of Divines voted in favour of the introduction of Presbyterianism into England. As a matter of fact, this was but the substitution of one rigid system for another, the Presbyterians being as intolerant of difference of opinion as their predecessors, the Episcopalians under Archbishop Laud. Milton, as an Independent, wanted that there should be complete religious toleration, each man having full liberty to follow his own conscience in matters of religion, and each congregation governing

itself in respect of its beliefs, rites and ceremonies. So this sonnet was written in angry protest, when the Long Parliament was about to introduce Presbyterianism into England.

1-4. Expl. This occurs in Milton's sonnet [Context]
On the New Forcers of Conscience under the Long Parliament. When the Westminster Assembly of Divines recommended the introduction of Presbyterianism into England, Milton, as an Independent, strongly opposed it.

He here says that the Presbyterians have indeed renounced Episcopacy and the Book of Common Prayer ; but they are nevertheless morally as low as the Episcopalians, in as much it is now clear that they wish to take advantage of the sinful Episcopal practice of Plurality, which enables the same clergyman to enjoy several church-livings together.

Prelate Lord—the Archbishop of Canterbury (with his subordinate bishops). Prelacy or Episcopacy was formally abolished in 1646.

Liturgy—the Book of Common Prayer, enforced by Archbishop Laud ; its use was forbidden by the Long Parliament.

Plurality,—or Pluralism, is the simultaneous enjoyment of more than one church-living by the same clergyman. This corrupt

practice, originating from greed of money, was in vogue amongst Episcopalians and Presbyterians as well. The Independents were against it.

Widowed—The Parliament declared that those priests who would not accept Presbyterianism would be removed from their posts. Thus many vacant sees would be created, which Milton speaks of as so many 'widows.' These vacant sees would be enjoyed by the Pluralist Presbyterian preachers.

Whore—indicates Milton's contempt for the unlawfulness and iniquity of the practice of Plurality. A clergyman is, as it were, married to his Church. Therefore if he enjoys more than one church-living at the same time, these are placed in the position of his concubines, not his lawful wife.

5-8. Expl. [Context as before.]

He says here, "Do you, Divines, in order to seize and enjoy many church-livings together, dare to invoke the power of the state to impose Presbyterianism by force on us, who cannot conscientiously accept it?"

Civil sword—Fig. Metonymy ; the authority of the state.

Ride us with—make us submit to.

Classic Hierarchy—A *classis* or Presbyterianery was the council that administered the

church-business of a town or district. It was subject to the synod of the province which again was subordinate to the Representative Assembly of Ministers and Elders. The system of Church government called Presbyterianism is here meant by Milton.

Mere A. S. and Rutherford—Adam Steuart, a Scotsman, and Samuel Rutherford, a divine of the Westminster Assembly, wrote pamphlets supporting Presbyterianism. 'Mere' expresses Milton's contempt,—a man who is known only by his initials !

9-12. Expl. [Context as before.]

The Parliament having laid down that any priest, who would not conform to Presbyterianism, would be declared a heretic and lose his living, Milton indignantly says :—
 "It is a pity that men as pious, learned and faithful as the greatest Apostles of Christ should now be declared unfaithful on the recommendation of foolish Scotch Presbyterians."

Paul—St. Paul, one of the twelve Apostles of Christ and the greatest preacher of Christianity.

Shallow Edwards—Thomas Edwards was a Presbyterian clergyman, who attacked Milton as a heretic. *Shallow*—stupid ; a man of little learning.

What-dye-call—expresses contempt. Milton cannot even remember his name, so insignificant a person he is. Perhaps he wants to allude to Rev. Robert Baillie.

13-19. Expl. [Context as before.]

In these lines, Milton expresses a hope that the House of Commons would not accept the recommendation of the Westminster Assembly which fraudulently misrepresented the real opinion of the majority in England. He expects the Parliament to read the Assembly a sharp lesson and reject its petition, thus removing all fears from the minds of true-hearted Englishmen, the Independents, who, by bringing charges of tyranny foul play, Plurality &c against the Presbyterians, will surely convince the Parliament of their hypocrisy and unworthiness.

Plots and packing—unfair means adopted to secure a majority of votes.

Trent—In the Tyrol a council was held to decide the points of dispute between Catholics and Protestants. The Roman Catholics, to secure their own interest, purposely "packed" this council with a majority of Roman Catholic ministers.

Phylacteries—lit. small boxes containing parchment inscribed with four texts of the scripture worn on the forehead by the Jews ;.

hence, a hypocritical parade of piety. Milton here (1) refers to the written representations of the Assembly and (2) also means the hypocrisy of the Presbyterians in general.

Baulk—originally (1) to pass over a place without visiting it ; hence (2) to ignore, to neglect ; here (3) to spare. The modern meaning is (4) to deprive.

Milton mockingly expresses a hope that the Parliament will not, however, cut off the ears of the Presbyterian Elders along with their phylacteries, though they fully deserve it. Milton is thinking of Prynne, a Puritan lawyer, whose writings against Episcopacy were punished by loss of his ears.

Wholesome—because, by the checking of Presbyterianism, England would be saved from religious oppression and perhaps another civil war.

Preventive—because, in this case, the shears are used to prevent or check the aggressive bigotry of the Presbyterians.

In your charge - in the charge or indictment to be brought against you by the Independents.

20. Expl. [Context as before].

The poet says that the new Presbyterian elders are more domineering and tyrannical in their bigoted intolerance of

composer of the time, who set Milton's *Comus* and *Arcades* to music.

He says that Lawes was the first Englishman who correctly taught his countrymen the subtleties of scanning, accentuation and pitch in music.

How to span—how to measure.

Just—true or correct ; a Latinism. The modern sense is 'impartial.'

Midas' ears—The ears of Midas, King of Phrygia, were transformed by Apollo into asses' ears, because Midas preferred the music of Pan to that of Apollo. The phrase here means,—'to scan as stupidly as an ass.'

4. *Committing*—Milton originally wrote 'misjoining.' 'Commit' here means 'to bring together', from Latin *Committere*, to match.

5. *Exempts thee from the throng*—strictly according to modern grammar, the verb should be plural. Here, 'worth' and 'skill' are intended to convey the same idea. The phrase means 'distinguishes thee above other musicians'.

9-11. Expl. [Context as before.]

He says "You are so great a musician that it is an honour to poetry to be set to music by you. Therefore poetry must honour you

in return. Hence I write this sonnet in praise of you."

Her wing—Poetry is personified as a bird and fame is her wing.

Phoebus' quire—the choir or band of singers, attending upon Apollo, the god of song and music ; hence, poets in general. The priest of this choir of poets is Lawes, says Milton.

Story—referring to the story of Ariadne. *The Complaint of Ariadne* by Cartwright was set to music by Lawes.

12-14. Expl. [Context as before.]

The poet says that even Dante will have to admit the superiority of Lawes to his friend, Casella, in respect of setting verses to music.

Casella, whom he wooed to sing &c.—Casella was a distinguished Florentine musician and a friend of Dante. As described in his *Purgatorio*, Dante, on his arrival in Purgatory, sees Casella and requests him to sing a song.

Purgatory—Purgatory, according to Roman Catholic belief, is a place of purification where disembodied souls are prepared for Paradise. In the *Inferno* or Hell, the worst sinners were punished with eternal damnation. Hence Purgatory is spoken of as 'milder.'

Sonnet No. XIV.

ON THE RELIGIOUS MEMORY OF MRS.
CATHERINE THOMSON, MY CHRISTIAN
FRIEND, DECEASED DEC. 16, 1646.

When Faith and Love, which parted from thee
never,
Had ripened thy just soul to dwell with God,
Meekly thou didst resign this earthly load
Of death, called life, which us from life doth
sever.

Thy works, and alms, and all thy good
endeavour,
Stayed not behind, nor in the grave were
trod;

But, as Faith pointed with her golden rod,
Followed thee up to joy and bliss for ever.
Love led them on ; and Faith, who knew them
best

Thy handmaids, clad them o'er with purple
beams

And azure wings, that up they flew so drest,
And speak the truth of thee on glorious
themes

Before the Judge ; who thenceforth bid thee
rest,
And drink thy fill of pure immortal streams.

2. *Ripened*—spiritually perfected.

[Context.]

3-4. Expl. This occurs in Milton's sonnet *On the Religious Memory of Mrs. Catherine Thomson*,—a tribute to the memory of a lady-friend, probably belonging to that Thomson family with whom Milton was a lodger in 1649.

The poet says that her virtuous deeds made her fit for heaven and she quietly gave up her being in order to enjoy eternal spiritual life with God in heaven.

This earthy load...doth sever.—The true life of the soul is considered to begin only after bodily death, so that life on earth in a material body is regarded as death for the soul.

5. *Thy work and alms &c.*—Cf. "Thy prayers and thine alms are gone up for a memorial before God." (Acts x-4).

5. *Endeavour*—here means 'actions' and not 'efforts' as in modern English ; from French *devoir*, meaning 'duty.'

6. *Nor in the grave were trod*—i. e. were not buried and forgotten.

7. *Her golden rod*—Faith is personified as an angel with a wand of gold. The conception is perhaps taken from the Bible. (Revelation xxi-15).

9-14. Expl. [Context as before.]

The poet says, "When you died, your 'works and alms' and 'good endeavour' followed you up to heaven. Love, which never deserted you, showed them the way and your faith as a Christian made them doubly glorious. In this way, they have borne testimony to your piety before the Great Judge, who, by way of reward, must have allowed you to enjoy eternal life and bliss in heaven.

Love, Faith &c.—The three typical Christian virtues are Faith, Hope and Charity or Love. The good works of this lady being prompted by Love and Faith, (and no earthly motive) must have made her worthy of heaven.

Knew them best &c.—Faith well knew that all good works were your constant companions.

Purple—here perhaps, lustrous or radiant. The strict meaning of the word is 'a deep-red colour'.

The Judge—God, who looks into the works of different souls and adjudges them to different places (Hell, Purgatory and Heaven) according to their deserts.

Pure immortal streams—a common Biblical metaphor, denoting the eternal spiritual life of the soul in heaven. Cf. "the waters of life" "living fountains", &c spoken of in the Bible.

Sonnet No. XV.

ON THE LORD GENERAL FAIRFAX AT THE
SIEGE OF COLCHESTER.

Fairfax, whose name in arms through Europe
rings,
Filling each mouth with envy or with praise,
And all her jealous monarchs with amaze,
And rumours loud that daunt remotest kings,
5 Thy firm unshaken virtue ever brings
Victory home, though new rebellions raise
Their Hydra heads, and the false North
displays
Her broken league to imp their serpent wings.
O yet a nobler task awaits thy hand
10 (For what can war but endless war still breed ?)
Till truth and right from violence be freed,
And public faith cleared from the shameful
brand
Of public fraud. In vain doth Valour bleed,
While Avarice and Rapine share the land.

1. *Name in arms*—i. e. fame as a general.

2. *Filling*—is used in two slightly different senses in the case of its two objects 'mouths' and 'monarchs.' Fig. Syllepsis.

3. *Amaze*—here, wonder and also fear ; in modern English, used as a verb only.

4. *Rumours*—object of the prep. 'with' in l. 2.

4. *Daunt &c.*—make them afraid of an overthrow of their government, as the English monarchy was overthrown by Fairfax Cromwell and other Parliamentary generals.

5-8. *Expl.* This occurs in Milton's sonnet addressed to the Lord General Fairfax, the commander-in-chief of the Parliamentary forces, who was at this time engaged in reducing the city of Colchester in Essex by seige. [Context.]

The poet praises him saying that his extreme personal courage has always made him successful in his campaigns and able to cope with the many Royalist risings occurring all over England at the time.

Virtue—here, courage. Latin *Virtus*=valour. The modern sense is goodness.

Hydra heads &c.—In 1648, there were new rebellions amongst the Cavaliers. Rebellion is here imaged as the Hydra, a many-headed serpent killed by Hercules. As soon as one head was struck off, two others grew in its place. The poet means that as soon as one rising was subdued fresh ones broke out in other parts.

The false North displays her broken league &c.—The Solemn League and Covenant

made in 1643 between the Scots and the Parliament was really first broken by the march of a Scotch army into England in support of Charles. Scotland, though herself guilty of breach of faith, renewed the war on the pretext that England had broken the league.

To imp their serpent wings—i.e. to renew the war. 'To imp' literally means to graft a new feather to a mutilated stump in a hawk's wing ; from M. E. *impen*, to graft. 'Imp' in modern English is an urchin.

Serpent wings—Euripides says that the Hydra had wings. 'Serpent' is here an adjective with a possessive force.

10. *Still*—always.

11-14. **Expl.** [Context as before.]

The poet says "You have another duty besides fighting against the enemies of the Parliament, namely to remove corruption from Church and state. In vain do the heroes of England fight and suffer as long as the mean and the avaricious hold sway in political and ecclesiastical matters"

Truth and right—Spiritual and temporal justice ; in other words, civil and ecclesiastical administration.

Public faith be cleared &c.—Civil troubles,

as Milton says in his prose works, led to the abuse of public money by the baser Presbyterians.

Public fraud—(1) general dishonesty ; (2) dishonesty in regard to public money.

Valour—figures Synecdoche (abstract for concrete) and Personification. Brave men.

Avarice and Rapine—figs. Synecdoche and Personification. The poet probably means greedy Pluralist clergymen and unscrupulous political adventurers respectively.

Sonnet No. XVI.

TO THE LORD GENERAL CROMWELL,
MAY 1652.

ON THE PROPOSALS OF CERTAIN MINISTERS
AT THE COMMITTEE FOR PROPAGATION
OF THE GOSPEL.

Cromwell, our chief of men, who through a
cloud
Not of war only, but detractions rude,
Guided by faith and matchless fortitude,
To peace and truth thy glorious way hast
ploughed,
And on the neck of crowned Fortune proud
Hast reared God's trophies, and his work
pursued,
While Darwen stream, with blood of Scots
imbrued,

And Dunbar field, resounds thy praises loud,
 And Worcester's laureate wreath : yet much
remains

- 10 To conquer still ; Peace hath her victories
 No less renowned than War : new foes arise,
 Threatening to bind our souls with secular
chains.
 Help us to save free conscience from the paw
 Of hireling wolves, whose Gospel is their maw.

The Occasion of the Sonnet. After the abolition of Episcopacy there was much confusion in the English Church. Some Independents, headed by John Owen, offered fifteen proposals to the *Committee for the propagation of the Gospel*,—a Committee formed by the Rump Parliament to administer Church-affairs. One of the proposals was 'that the preachers should receive a public maintenance.' Milton, though himself an Independent, was against this proposal and wrote this sonnet by way of protest.

3. *Faith*—that you are doing your duty in the sight of the Lord.

4. *Hast ploughed*—hast forced thy way onward overcoming all resistance. In l. 2, this resistance has been called 'a cloud' of

'war' and 'detractions' ; 'to *plough* one's way through a *cloud*' is a mixture of metaphors.

5-9. Expl. This occurs in Milton's sonnet [Context.]
To the Lord General Cromwell. When some Independents headed by John Owen, proposed that the clergy should be state-fed, Milton wrote this sonnet, protesting against the proposal.

In these lines, the poet recounts the glorious achievements of Cromwell,—his victories at Preston, Dunbar and Worcester which have eventually led to the overthrow of Charles I's autocratic royalty.

On the neck...God's trophies—i.e. your victories, which are so many memorials of God's victorious power, (for you have been fighting on the side of Justice and Religion), have crushed down the proud tyrant of England.

Crowned Fortune—The allusion is to the defeat and execution of Charles I at the hands of the Parliamentary party. *Fortune*—a double figure : Synecdoche (abstract for concrete) and Personification.

Darwen stream—near Preston, where Cromwell defeated the Scots under Hamilton (1648).

Dunbar—where Cromwell routed the Scots under Leslie (1650).

Worcester—where Cromwell utterly crushed the Royalists (1651).

Laureate wreath—Cromwell himself called this battle his “crowning mercy.” This victory was a death-blow to the Royalist cause.

10-14. Expl. [Context as before.]

Addressing Cromwell, he says, “You have done much as a general, yet much remains to be done in respect of the civil administration of the country. Men, whose object is not the spiritual welfare of their countrymen but their own monetary gain, are proposing that the ministry should be state-supported, which would be bad policy, in as much as it would lead to the subjection of our free conscience to secular control. These ‘new foes’ of England are like so many greedy wolves, and worship their stomach more than they do the Saviour.”

Peace..... War.—Fig. Antithesis. By the ‘victories’ of Peace, Milton means the subjugation of the internal foes of a nation and thus (the prevention of a civil war) by a sound yet firm internal administration of the country. The ‘victories’ of war are conquests of ‘foreign foes.’ Milton implies that both the tasks are equally difficult. A great administrator is therefore no less worthy jo

renown than a great general. The task of bringing about a peaceful and prosperous administration is no less onerous than that of conquering a foe in battle.

New foes—i.e. John Owen and his party ; as distinguished from the old foes, the Royalists.

Hireling wolves—i.e. ministers supported by the state, whose sole aim in life would be money. 'Hireling' expresses contempt. Milton thought that, being paid by the state, such ministers would be naturally enslaved to the Government in matters of conscience. Thus the Church, instead of remaining a free political factor, would become a servile supporter of the state.

Gospel—literally, good tidings ; the doctrines of Christ.

Maw—stomach ; from German *magen*.

Sonnet No. XVII.

TO SIR HENRY VANE THE YOUNGER.
 Vane, young in years, but in sage counsel old,
 Than whom a better senator ne'er held
 The helm of Rome, when gowns, not arms,
repelled
 The fierce Epirot and the African bold,
 Whether to settle peace, or to unfold
 The drift of hollow states hard to be spelled ;

Then to advise how war may best upheld
 Move by her two main nerves, iron and gold,
 In all her equipage ; besides, to know
 10 Both spiritual power and civil, what each
means,
 What severs each, thou hast learned, which
• few have done.
 The bounds of either sword to thee we owe :
 Therefore on thy firm hand Religion leans
 In peace, and reckons thee her eldest son.

[Context.] 1-6. **Expl.** This occurs in Milton's sonnet
To Sir Henry Vane the Younger.

The poet says that, though he was but forty years old, Vane was a wiser statesman than the senators of Rome, who, through their unity and able statesmanship repelled the invasion of Pyrrhus, King of Epirus and of Hannibal, the general of Carthage. Vane was the only man competent to draw up a treaty or to expose the perplexing hollowness of a foreign Government.

Young.....old—fig. Antithesis.

Senator—strictly, a member of the Roman Senate ; hence a Roman statesman.

Helm &c.—The state is compared to a ship, and the leading statesman is its pilot.

Gowns, not arms—not military strength, but wise statesmanship. The gown is the

toga worn by the Roman senator. Fig. Metonymy (sign for thing signified) ; or Synecdoche (concrete for abstract).

Epirot—Pyrrhus of Epirus invaded Italy in 280 B. C. to help the Italians against Rome.

The African bold—Hannibal of Carthage marched into Italy and won several victories against Rome but was at last compelled to retire. Carthage was a town on the coast of Africa. Hence 'African.'

The drift of hollow states—referring probably to the insincere Dutch republic, with which the Commonwealth fought a naval war.

8. *Nerves*—Cf. the modern expression, 'sinews of war.'

9. *In all her equipage*—with all its paraphernalia. The personification of war as a feminine being is queer.

11. *What severs each*—the respective limits of each.

12-14. Expl. [Context as before]

After eulogising the statesmanship of Sir Henry Vane, the poet adds "You have learnt by practical experience the true nature and

limits of the two kinds of authority in a state, namely, civil and spiritual. So the Church of England confidently depends on you as her chief support."

Either sword—secular and ecclesiastical authority respectively. Fig. Metonymy. The expression '*spiritual sword*' is however rather unusual.

Her eldest son—the chief support of the Church-mother. An eldest son is his mother's mainstay. Fig. Metaphor.

Sonnet No. XVIII.

ON THE LATE MASSACRE IN PIEDMONT.

Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints,
whose bones
 Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold ;
 Even them who kept thy truth so pure of old,
 When all our fathers worshipped stocks and
stones,
 5 Forget not : in thy book record their groans
 Who were thy sheep, and in their ancient fold
 Slain by the bloody Piedmontese, that rolled
 Mother with infant down the rocks. Their
moans
 The vales redoubled to the hills, and they
 10 To heaven. Their martyred blood and ashes
sow

O'er all the Italian fields, where still doth
sway
 The triple Tyrant ; that from these may grow
 A hundredfold, who, having learnt thy way,
 Early may fly the Babylonian woe.

The Occasion of the Sonnet. The Vaudois or Waldenses, (so called because they were followers of one Peter Waldo, a Lyons merchant,) were a sect of Christians resembling the later Protestants. They originated about the close of the 12th. century and lived at first in Southern France, whence they were forced by persecution to migrate to a hilly district of Piedmont. In 1655, the Duke of Savoy ordered them either to accept Roman Catholicism or to leave the country. Those who refused to do either, were brutally massacred with their wives and children. Their simplicity of worship and Protestant-like doctrines evoked intense sympathy in their favour at this massacre all over England. Milton too, being an Independent, felt for them deeply and so wrote this sonnet.

1-4. Expl. This occurs in Milton's sonnet *On the Late Massacre in Piedmont*. In 1655, the Duke of Savoy ordered a general massacre

[Context.]

of the Waldenses, a Christian sect living in his territory, hoping to force them thereby into the Roman Catholic fold.

Milton here eloquently calls down the vengeance of God upon the Duke of Savoy and his brutal officers who committed this outrage upon a sect that worshipped God according to the purest Christian rites from very ancient times.

So pure—from the Protestant point of view. Their worship was very simple and free from cumbrous Roman Catholic ceremonials.

Of old—The sect really originated about the end of the 12th. century, though supposed, at that time, to belong to the Apostolic age.

Stocks and stones—i.e. the images in a Roman Catholic Church.

5. *In thy book*—a Biblical idea. Cf. *Psalm* xvi-8, "My tears, are they not in thy book?" See also *Revelation* xx-2.

5-6. *Their groans who*—i.e. the groans of them, who.

7. *The bloody Piedmontese*—the Duke of Savoy and his officers.

7-8. *Rolled...rocks*—an actual incident.

9. *They*—i.e. the hills.

10-14 Expl [Context as before.]

After eloquently condemning this barbarous act, Milton says that their blood would form the seed of the true Church which will eventually upset the Pope of Rome and his false religion.

Their martyred blood &c.—The allusion is to the famous saying of Tertullian,—“The blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church.”

Sow—is in the Imperative mood, ‘blood and ashes’ being its object.

The triple tyrant—(1) the Pope, who wore a tiara surrounded by three crowns, (2) ‘triple’ has also an intensive force, the very cruel tyrant.

The Babylonian woe &c.—The Puritans, in their interpretation of the Book of Revelation, took Babylon as referring to the Papal Church.

Woe—the destruction of Babylon, foretold in the Book of St. John.

Sonnet No. XIX.

ON HIS BLINDNESS.

When I consider how my light is spent
Ere half my days in this dark world and wide,

teaches us that God expects everyone to utilise his powers and faculties to the fullest extent.

Which is death to hide—(1) which *it* is death to hide ; or (2) to hide which is death. By 'death', Milton here means damnation or divine wrath and punishment.

Returning—on the Day of Judgment.

Chide—me, for neglect of duty.

8. *Fondly*—foolishly ; 'fond' is the past participle of M. E. *fonnen*, to act like a fool.

8. *Patience*—i.e. patient or deliberate reflection. Fig. Personification.

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10. *His own gifts*—back from man.

14. **Expl.** [Context as before.]

The poet, after lamenting his loss of eyesight, consoles himself with the idea that service of God is performed not by active work alone but by calm passivity or resignation ; for God is not dependent on the work done by man.

A deep spiritual truth underlies this statement of Milton's. God has appointed duties for man, not that He is in any way helped by man's performance of them, but that man, by duly performing them, may purify himself

and ultimately win salvation. Therefore, as calm resignation to the decrees of Providence also chastens and uplifts a man, such a life is spiritually as useful as an active life of duties.

Sonnet. No. XX.

TO MR. LAWRENCE.

Lawrence, of virtuous father virtuous son,
Now that the fields are dank, and ways are
mire.

Where shall we sometimes meet, and by the
fire

Help waste a sullen day, what may be won
From the hard season gaining? Time will run
On smoother, till Favonius reinspire
The frozen earth, and clothe in fresh attire
The lily and rose, that neither sowed nor spun.
What neat repast shall feast us, light and
choice,

10 Of Attic taste, with wine, whence we may rise
To hear the lute well touched, or artful voice
Warble immortal notes and Tuscan air?
He who of those delights can judge, and spare
To interpose them oft, is not unwise.

f. *Of virtuous father virtuous son*—an
epithet from Horace.

2. *Waste*—here, 'spend' : not used in its modern bad sense of 'to spend fruitlessly.'

4-5. *What may be won from the hard season gaining*—gaining what may be won from the hard season ; i.e. making the best of this bad season which prevents all out-door enjoyments.

5-8. *Expl.* This occurs in Milton's sonnet
To Mr. Lawrence.

[Context.]

The poet suggests to his friend that, since winter prevents out-door life, they should meet by some fireside and help each other to spend the time pleasantly, as well as profitably. Thus will they merrily pass the winter, till the South-West wind begins to blow again, proclaiming the advent of spring.

Favonius—the South-West wind.

Re-inspire—(1) Re-vivify ; or (2) breathe upon (the literal sense of the word).

The lily...spun—an adaptation of a line in St. Matthew.

10. *Of Attic taste*—Even in his enjoyments, Milton was elegant and temperate. The phrase means, 'such as would please the simple and refined Athenian taste.'

11. *Artful*—in its literal sense of 'skilful.'
The modern sense is 'cunning'.

12. *Tuscan*—i.e. Italian. Italy (of which
Tuscany is a province) is famous for music.

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14-14. *Spare to interpose*—refrain from
interposing.

Sonnet No. XXI.

TO CYRIAC SKINNER.

Cyriac, whose grandsire on the royal bench
Of British Themis, with no mean applause,
Pronounced, and in his volumes taught, our
laws,
Which others at their bar so often wrench ;
5 To-day deep thoughts resolve with me to
drench
In mirth that after no repenting draws ;
Let Euclid rest, and Archimedes pause,
And what the Swede intend, and what the
French.
15 To measure life learn thou betimes, and know
Toward solid good what leads the nearest way ;
For other things mild Heaven a time ordains,
And disapproves that care, though wise in
show,
That with superfluous burden loads the day,
And, when God sends a cheerful hour, refrains.

2. *Themis*—the personification of law and justice.

4. *Which others ..wrench*—which other judges or lawyers so often twist or misinterpret.

5-8. Expl. This occurs in Milton's [Context.] sonnet *To Cyriac Skinner*.

The poet, in these lines, proposes to his friend and pupil, Cyriac Skinner, on one occasion, that they should drown deep and serious thoughts in innocent mirth; he requests Cyriac to leave aside for a time his study of Mathematics and Mechanics and his interest in foreign politics.

Euclid—the well-known Greek geometri-
cian.

Archimedes—the mathematician of Syracuse and founder of Hydrostatics.

What the Swede intends—Sweden was then at war with Poland.

What the French—France was at war with Spain.

9. *To measure life learn thou*—Realise the shortness of life and make the most of it in every way. The idea is borrowed from Horace.

11-14. **Expl.** [Context as before.]

Milton advises Cyriac Skinner to recognize the distinction between spiritual and worldly duties. For the former, every moment should be utilised, but as regards the latter, kind Providence has ordained that there is a time for higher thoughts as well as for serious occupation. The conduct of one, who insists on filling his days with continuous serious toil and refuses an hour of relaxation, is not approved of by God.

Milton here condemns over-anxiety for the performance of duties as false wisdom

Not unwise—Fig. Litotes.

Sonnet No. XXII.

TO THE SAME.

Cyriac, this three years' day, these eyes,
though clear,

To outward view, of blemish or of spot,
 Bereft of light, their seeing have forgot ;
 Nor to their idle orbs doth sight appear
 Of sun, or moon, or star, throughout the year,
 Or man, or woman. Yet I argue not
 Against Heaven's hand or will, nor hate a jot
 Of heart or hope, but still bear up and steer
 Right onward. What supports me, dost thou
ask ?

The conscience, friend, to have lost them

overplied "

Love, sweetness, goodness, in her person
shined

So clear as in no face with more delight.
But, oh ! as to embrace me she inclined,
I waked, she fled, and day brought back my
night.

1-4. Expl. This occurs in Milton's sonnet [Context.] *On his Deceased Wife*. He speaks of his deceased second wife, Catherine Woodcock, who appeared to him in a dream.

It seemed to the poet that his lost wife had returned to him just as Alcestis was restored to Admetus in days of yore.

Alcestis—wife of Admetus, a Thessalian king. She sacrificed herself in order to deliver her husband from death. Hercules, 'Jove's great son,' (see l. 3) took pity on her and restored her to Admetus.

Saint—my wife, who is (1) now an angel in heaven, and (2) pure and pious in character.

Glad husband—Fig Prolepsis.

5-9. Expl. [Context as before.]

She appeared to the poet clothed in robes of pure white, such as befitted an angel of heaven, or a mother who had just finished her period of purification after childbirth.

Washed from &c.—According to the law of Moses, women after childbirth have

to go through a period of purification. [Cf. the *অশ্রু* observed by the Hindus]. Catherine Woodcock, as a matter of fact, died in childbed of a daughter.

10. *To my fancied sight*—(1) in my imagination; (2) to the eye-sight which I seemed to have in my dream.

11. *Shined*—in modern English, 'shone'.

12. *With more delight*—'than in her face', understood.

12-14. Expl. [Context as before.]

He says "Methought she bent over me to embrace me; but, unfortunately, just then I awoke and with the end of my dream, her sweet figure vanished from before my mind's eye. Once more, I was in the night of perpetual darkness caused by my blindness".

Inclined—bent herself down. The verb in this sense is transitive in modern English.

Day brought back my night—fig. Epigram. While dreaming, the poet had a sort of sight as it were. As soon as he awoke, the perpetual night of blindness was upon him again. *Day*—his awakening at dawn. *Night*—the darkness of blindness.



